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PART THREE

CHAPTER XII

HISTORICAL

000 'HEUREUX les peuples qui n'ont pas d'histoire', quotes Father Van Wing in introducing his *Études Bakongo*, and having noted that the Kongo people 'had entered into history' in 1482 with the discovery of the River Congo.[1] It is very doubtful whether there are any people, however primitive, or however remote or inaccessible their dwelling, who could qualify for that blessed state. If this characterization means entering upon the stage of continuous contact with Europe and Europeans, it may mark a definite stage in the life of this people.

175 101 The Ovimbundu have not in this sense as old a 'history' as have the Kongo people. Their first contacts with Europeans probably took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries before their formation as a people—before they were Ovimbundu; but it was from the second or third quarter of the eighteenth century that they began to have regular and constant contacts which have continued with increasing frequency down to the present day.

Pre-History

• 172 The pre-history of the Umbundu country awaits competent investigation and should prove a fruitful field. Dr. Merlin W. Ennis has collected stone artifacts from several sites, but chiefly from Elende (twelve miles north of the railway station of Cuma), some of which have been placed in the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, some in the Logan Museum of Beloit College (Wisconsin), and some in the National Museum of Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. These artifacts have been classified as similar to those of the Chellean culture.[2] The strata from which they

[1] R.P. Van Wing, S.J., *Études Bakongo* (Bruxelles: Goemaere, 1921), p. 1.

[2] For a description, see J. J. Williams, S.J., *Africa's God* (Boston College, 1937), V. Congo and Angola, p. 96; also W. D. Hambly, *The Ovimbundu of Angola* (Field Museum, 1934), p. 207. Several Portuguese and Belgian writers have described stone artifacts found near the northern borders of Angola, comparing them with examples discovered at various sites in the Congo. See *Trabalhos do I° Congresso Nacional de Antropologia Colonial*, Pôrto, 1934: J. R. Santos, Jr., 'Rui de Serpa Pinto e a arqueologia de Angola', pp. 433–51;

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were taken yielded no pottery. Polished stone implements have not been found. Rock paintings or reliefs have not been observed.[1] This region has as yet yielded up no pre-historic skeletal remains. Whether any are present only competent and intensive study may reveal. The geological structure must be borne in mind: that this is one of the oldest parts of the earth's surface, having been exposed since primeval times, and without having had the great earth movements which took place in the eastern part of the continent.

The presence of stone ruins has been mentioned by several writers.[2] I have evidence for the existence of ruins at fifteen sites so widely scattered over Umbundu territory that practically every region of major importance is represented. I feel sure that if a careful survey were made, at least twice this number would be found. All those which have been reported thus far are of similar construction—of natural unworked stone, loosely placed, without any attempt to use mud or mortar; all were evidently built for defence, and all the sites were obviously chosen because of the natural advantages of the terrain, as, for example, on an eminence or at the confluence of streams. Some seem to have had earthworks in addition to the walls of stone.[3] Considering the materials used most of them were evidently well built and well adapted to the specific purpose for which they were intended. Some are now in a better state of preservation than others. Major Artur de Paiva reported that in October 1890 the *Ombala* (capital village) of Sambu, then occupied, had formerly been strongly fortified, as evidenced by the remains of 'walls of loose stone and others of earthworks in front of the present palisades'.[4] In one of the Elende forts may be seen evidence of important iron workings.

In May 1936, while on a field trip in the region of Kasongi (Cassongue), I visited a site called Usengo which had been

and J. da Silveira and J. R. dos Santos, Jr., 'Instrumento pre-historico de quartzo, etc.', pp. 532–5; also J. Janmart, *Subsídios para a História, Arqueologia, e Etnografia dos povos da Lunda* (Lisboa, 1936).

[1] Marquardsen–Stahl (*Angola*) mention a 'rock painting', but on investigation it was found to be quite recent.

[2] Hambly, loc. cit.; E. W. Smith, *Africa, What Do We Know of It?* (1935), p. 64 f.; Serpa Pinto, *How I Crossed Africa*, i. 86; Major Artur de Paiva in *Boletim Soc. Geog. Lisboa*, Serie 14, p. 14; Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery*, p. 81; Cameron, *Across Africa*, p. 405.

[3] Paiva, p. 18; also *Annaes do Cons. Ultr.*, Serie I, p. 520.

[4] Paiva, loc. cit. He also reported the stone ruins at a site in Cingolo (*Quingolo*), which I am inclined to believe was the same site previously reported by Major Serpa Pinto in 1877 (loc. cit.).

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172 fortified with loose stone walls built upon a great rock out-crop, projecting portions of which greatly reinforced the wall and made it unnecessary to build a complete circuit. The wall reached a height of nearly six feet in places. Inside the fortress, under an overhanging ledge of rock, I picked up fragments of pottery evidently of Umbundu make, and also pieces of wine jug of tne type used by the Portuguese for *vinho verde*. The dry season had just begun and the growth of grass in the ruin was very rank so that it was not possible to make a systematic search for other vestiges of former occupation. Across the valley, at the village of Ndumba, I found an old man seeming to be about sixty-five or seventy years of age, who declared that he had himself helped to build the walls of Usengo in his youth 'before he had married'. He said that they had fortified the place against the exactions of Soma[1] Saviti of Kasongi; that three chiefs had ruled in it,[2] and that the reason for moving was lack of nearby supplies of water and of earth to daub the walls of the huts, the village site being solid rock. This, he said, was all during the reign of Saviti and before the end of the rubber trade, which fixes it approximately between the dates 1890 and 1910. The largest of the three ruins on the slopes of Elende, mentioned by Hambly and by E. W. Smith,[3] is the subject of a legend recounted by Elende villagers which ascribes its building to Ovimbundu or their immediate predecessors. The most detailed and circumstantial report of the building and occupancy of one of these ruins is found in an account of the campaign of 1774–6, in which Portuguese troops and native allies fought the kings of Bailundu (*Baylundo*) and Cingolo (*Quingolo*), and their allies.[4] The map of this campaign,[5] drawn in 1776, contains an inset representing a plan of the fortification alluded to, which, according to the report,[6] was too strong to be taken and was beseiged until the defenders fled by night, when it was entered, sacked, and thrown down, which last operation occupied nearly two months. Further evidence that the Ovimbundu were using stone-walled fortresses during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is found in the fact that the Portuguese reports of these periods generally allude to the forti-

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[1] King or Chief.
[2] (1) Ekulika, the builder; (2) Ukelengenje; and (3) Satutu, who moved out.
[3] See *supra*, p. 165, n. 2.
[4] *Annaes do Cons. Ultr.*, loc. cit.
[5] Op. cit., facing p. 518.
[6] Op. cit., p. 520 f.; and especially *Catalogo dos Governadores*, pp. 423 ff.

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

fied towns of the natives as *quipacas*, a word adapted from the Umbundu word *ocimbaka*, meaning a wall. The word for the palisade with which their villages are now enclosed is *olumbo*. Until evidence is adduced to the contrary, it seems that we must conclude that the stone-walled ruins found throughout the Umbundu country were built by Ovimbundu or by their immediate (Bantu) predecessors. As the ruins of Rhodesia and Mozambique seem to have been built by Bantu under Arab or Malay influences, so the Ovimbundu may have modelled their fortifications on the Portuguese forts which they had seen at Caconda, at the coast, along the Kuanza River, or even the walls with which individual traders fortified their establishments. These various forts were first built between 1575 and 1603, and it is probable that individual Ovimbundu themselves took part in some of the building operations.

Tribal Divisions of the Ovimbundu

Before going on with Umbundu history let us fix in mind the principal kingdoms, tribes, or divisions of the Ovimbundu and their present location with reference to one another and to their other neighbours. This may most easily be seen with the aid of the accompanying map.[1] Their mutual relations prior to effective Portuguese occupation, whether of dependence or independence, are also shown. These are the divisions the Ovimbundu were found to have at the beginning of the present century, and these are the divisions still recognized by them, although they no longer retain their former political significance. It is of interest to find that according to Ladislau Magyar, who lived in and travelled through the Umbundu country from 1849 until 1857,[2] essentially these same divisions were then in existence. Under date of 1 August 1799 the Governor of Benguela reported on the 'provinces' and people in the hinterland.[3] It is significant to find that the divisions of the Ovimbundu were then essentially the same as they are

[1] Facing p. 164.

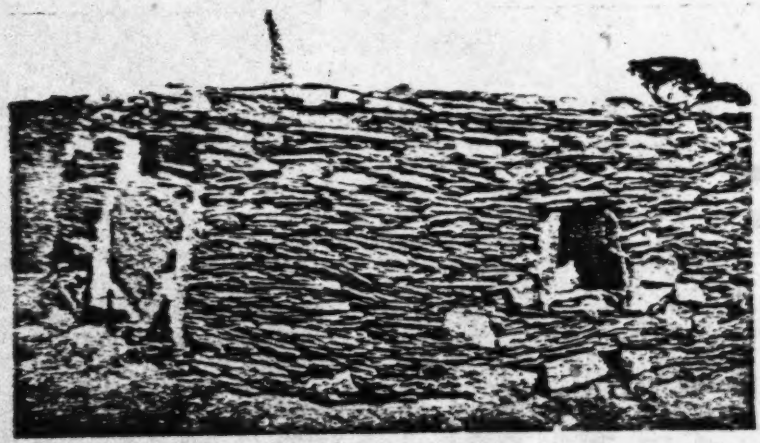
[2] Ladislau Magyar, *Reisen in Süd-Afrika* (tr. Hunfalvy), Pesth, 1859. Magyar made 'Quipeyo' (Cipeyo) a part of Bailundu and Sambu a sort of tributary. 'Quibula' (Civula), he said, paid tribute to 'Quiyaka' (Ciyaka).

[3] See *Annaes Maritimos e Coloniaes*, 4a Ser., pp. 147–61 (*parte não official*). This report made 'Quipeyo' tributary to Huambo, 'Ondura' (Ndulu) to Bailundu. Several kingdoms, later tributaries of Ciyaka, were listed as independent.

1: Childs M-S (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

PLATE XVI

a. Ruins at Usengo: section of wall between stone outcrops



b. Rock tomb of the va Sela (Kasongi)

[Facing p. 177]

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

THE OVIMBUNDU OF ANGOLA

I. INTRODUCTION

Research work among the Ovimbundu of Angola indicates the 121
presence of numerous cultural traits revealing what are probably distinct stratifications of culture. These diverse elements have been welded together into a pattern, the examination of which constitutes the present problem.

The object of this study is an analysis of these traits with a view to showing the sequence in which they have been received, from whence they came, and the processes which have been responsible for coordinating them so as to form the present social system.

My presentation passes from geographical and historical considerations to an ethnological approach, locally applied in the first place for complete analysis of the culture of the Ovimbundu and surrounding peoples. The traits have to be considered singly and in combination. Then follows an examination of some of these traits which are widely distributed outside Angola. We next seek to ascertain the geographical origin of traits, their history, and the psychology of their combinations and assimilation into an aggregate. What elements have been acquired through adoption? And what has been the historical process? Which traits have arisen through independent invention? What factors have been discarded, and why? To what extent have the Ovimbundu utilized opportunities for enriching their culture, and what possibilities have been neglected?

What are the classes of evidence which might be expected to assist an inquiry into the growth of Umbundu culture?

Field work was of primary importance for obtaining a first hand knowledge of the tribal life of the Ovimbundu as it exists today, and in order to estimate the effects of cultural contacts extensive journeys were made to the north, east, and south of the central territory occupied by the Ovimbundu. The results of personal investigation are given in chapters IV–IX, dealing with the economic, social, and religious life of the Ovimbundu. These facts have been kept free from the observations of other investigators whose reports are summarized in chapter III, "Historical Sources."

Unfortunately there are no archaeological data which can assist 172
a study of historical processes, for archaeology has not yet been approached in Angola.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

are small streams of pure water falling down the cliffs and hillsides. 361
Near Bailundu and Ngalangi, villages still retain their defences which consist of high poles set in a trench.

Judging from sites visited at Elende there was a pre-Ovimbundu 172
stone-building culture. One of the sites has such a commanding 712
view over extensive plains and valleys that the position would be almost impregnable. At the present day the line of fortifications is well marked by stone walls three feet high. These are composed of boulders to which the builders had ready access on adjacent hillsides. Large stones were no doubt rolled from the slopes to the small plateau chosen as a building site. This small plain lies midway between the hill crest and the valley.

At present this old site, which is enclosed by lichen-covered walls, is overgrown by tall grass and trees attaining twenty feet in height. Photography would be uninstructive unless a preliminary clearance were made—a formidable task owing to the density of vegetation.

In the center of the enclosure is a group of transported boulders possibly marking the site of a place of assembly. A search among the long grass reveals stone slabs and cylindrical crushers which were used for grinding grain over a very long period, as may be seen by the wear on the base stone; some thick stones are so worn as to be almost perforated. Weather-worn stones that were probably used as scrapers, are to be found. Surface potsherds are of the material of which present-day Ovimbundu women make their cooking pots. These sherds mark the places now used by small nomadic bands, hence the surface pottery may have no connection with a pre-Umbundu culture.

In the vicinity of this walled stone village are hillside cairns marking the sites of graves. These have been robbed by medicine-men in search of material for their charms.

The Ovimbundu have no traditions regarding the site, neither is there legendary or other evidence to show that the Ovimbundu ever [764] made their villages of stone. The raising of a cairn of stones over the body of a hunter is, however, a present-day practice near Ganda and in the Esele country.

If a site cannot be systematically worked, it is better left alone until scientific investigation is possible. The preliminary clearance of grass and timber would be a long process. The archaeological material recovered from such a site would be of a uniform and simple kind. There is no evidence of anything beyond an elementary stone age culture.

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu FP13

XII. CULTURAL PROCESSES

Analysis of African Cultures

The difficulties of making a study of the Ovimbundu in their relation to a general background of African cultures are connected with unsolved problems of archaeology, physical anthropology, linguistic study, and the history of cultural traits. 172

With the exception of data from Algeria, Egypt, Kenya, and south Africa there is a paucity of archaeological information which might determine the antiquity of past cultures, the relation of these to past and present races, and the routes by which races and cultures traveled. In the regions mentioned systematic excavations are in progress, but for the greater part of Africa archaeologists have no knowledge of the relative antiquity of stone implements found on the surface.

African ethnologists are not consistent in the connotations of terms such as Bantu and Hamitic. The word Bantu primarily refers to a linguistic family of Negroes, but a Bantu Negro culture exists with many divisions, and later we shall see that a somatological concept is associated with the word Bantu. The word Hamitic may describe a linguistic family, a series of physical traits differing from those which characterize the Negro, and a type of pastoral culture in which all the activities and beliefs of tribal life center in the keeping of cattle. The adjective Semitic can also be used to denote a well-defined linguistic family, a type of culture, or somatic traits. But the Semitic problem does not concern us since the Ovimbundu have no traits that could be associated with Semitic culture, either Mohammedan or pre-Koranic; with the possible exception of blood brotherhood by exchange of blood, and the use of a scapegoat (Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, p. 296; Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia, pp. 57, 61). [174]

The comparative studies of physical anthropologists are retarded by paucity of skeletal material both ancient and modern, while series of measurements on living subjects, especially women, are inadequate in relation to the great size of Africa and the complexity of the problems which arise from comparative study of anatomical data. 144 114

Darwin's "Descent of Man" recognized the possibility of man's origin in Africa, and the recent excavations of L. S. B. Leakey in Kenya may finally prove that the oldest remains of *Homo sapiens*